

In the News

Leading the Way In Juvenile Court

A recent story in the San Jose *Mercury News* highlighted the many initiatives being implemented by the Superior Court of San Mateo County Juvenile Court and its supervising judge, Marta S. Diaz.

The article, "Judge Makes Changes in Youth Court" (March 13), announced the opening of the court's assessment center, where every juvenile arrested in the county is interviewed by a team of specialists focusing on the youth's mental, physical, and emotional health. The story also mentions the children's waiting rooms the court has set up at its hall of justice and juvenile court locations.

"The article was a result of a press release sent out by our community outreach coordinator, Jill Selvaggio," reports Judge Diaz. "The release announced the grand opening of both our assessment center and the new children's waiting room in San Mateo. I was able to speak to the reporter and share some of the other programs we've implemented in the juvenile court."

The reporter touched on other initiatives by Judge Diaz, such as the Kids Learning Em-

pathy and Respect program, in which peer mediations focus on how discrimination feels. The article also mentioned that Judge Diaz had arranged for the courtroom walls to be stripped of their dark paneling and painted a more soothing pistachio color.

The community gained awareness of the changes taking place in its juvenile justice system as a result of the press release and the ensuing article.

Other court-related events in the news:

"Court Creates a Safe Place for Seniors," *Recorder* (San Francisco), February 22, 2002

Detailed how the Superior Court of Alameda County, working with other local organizations, created a separate calendar for elderly litigants to obtain restraining orders.

"Judge Presents Council With County Court Facts," *News-Messenger* (Lincoln), February 14, 2002

Reported on Superior Court of Placer County Judge James Garbolino's delivery of the court's



A recent story in the San Jose *Mercury News* described the Superior Court of San Mateo County's new Juvenile Assessment Center. Pictured is the interview room, where juveniles arrested in the county are seen by a team of specialists focusing on the youths' mental, physical, and emotional health. Photo: Courtesy of the Superior Court of San Mateo County

first State of the Courts message to the Roseville City Council.

"County Superior Courts Receive \$75,000 in Grants," *Reporter* (Vacaville), February 11, 2002

Announced that the Superior Court of Solano County had received a grant to improve its methods of providing information to the public.

"Mental Health Courts Impress," *Press Enterprise* (Riverside), February 4, 2002

Described the Superior Court of

Riverside County's mental health court, which aims to assist the community by treating, instead of jailing, mentally ill people.

"Mental Health Court Offers New Options," *Los Angeles Times*, January 4, 2002

Reported on the Superior Court of Los Angeles County's juvenile mental health court, where the judge orders treatment and monitoring to minimize youths' chances of additional run-ins with the law. ■

Courts Managing HR Data

A new project is under way that promises the courts faster access to human resources (HR) information.

In April the Administrative Office of the Courts' (AOC) Human Resources Division began collaborating with the superior courts to build a human resources management information system (HRMIS) for the judicial branch. The new system will be flexible

enough to function regionally as well as statewide.

The final configuration of the judicial branch HRMIS will depend on the courts' specific functional and technical requirements. Some of the HRMIS capabilities to be explored by the courts and the AOC are:

□ A two-way data exchange between the HR system and a third-party payroll system (if

needed), which could include a wide range of functions for human resources, benefits, compensation, and savings plans;

□ Budgeting support for salary planning, which would allow for the creation of several budgets for the same period as well as multiple salary structures (e.g., salaried and hourly employees);

□ Sophisticated report-

generating capabilities that enable employers to prepare ad hoc as well as mandatory periodic reports such as census, labor force, OSHA, and EEO compliance reports;

□ Streamlining of recruitment and elimination of redundancies and delays for applicants, employees, managers, and recruiters;

□ "Skill matching" to support recruitment, training, and succession planning; and

□ Automatic triggers and notification procedures (using e-mail, for example) to track complex business or employee events such as hiring, termination, and performance evaluation.

The HRMIS project consists of three phases: (1) a consultant-conducted statewide HRMIS and HR needs assessment, including a court-by-court review of HR management systems, staffing, division of labor, and technology needs; (2) a vendor selection and feasibility study; and (3) implementation.

The AOC's Human Resources Division anticipates that the initial assessment phase will begin July 1.

● For more information on the HRMIS project, contact Hazel Ann Reimche, project manager, 415-865-4263; e-mail: hazel.ann.reimche@jud.ca.gov. ■

AOC Pilots Trial Court Financial System

With assistance from ea consulting, inc., the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) is designing an electronic financial system for the state's trial courts, using SAP, a financial software developed at MIT. The AOC anticipates that the SAP system will deliver real-time information that will meet the daily accounting needs of the courts.

Given the historic development of California's superior courts, it is natural that most are currently using county-provided financial systems. These systems often lack statewide or AOC reporting functions.

To remedy the situation, in December 1999 the AOC began to design a statewide system. As part of

that project, and with assistance from the trial courts, the AOC developed the *Trial Court Financial Policies and Procedures Manual*, containing uniform, statewide guidelines. In addition, the AOC conducted a needs assessment and issued a request for proposals so that it could select a financial consultant to help with the design of the new electronic system.

The Superior Court of Stanislaus County agreed to assist the AOC with the initial design and testing of the SAP system. If this pilot project is deemed successful, the Stanislaus court will become the first to implement the new system, in fiscal year 2002-2003. The AOC's goal is to im-

plement the new system for all courts within the next three to five years.

As the project develops, the AOC plans to establish regional off-site accounting processing centers (APCs) to handle the transaction processing required for the new system. The APCs will replace the current day-to-day accounting transaction processing performed by the county, and will provide knowledgeable staff to assist the courts. In addition, over the next six months, the AOC's Trial Court Fiscal Services Unit will continue to perform accounting assessments of the courts to determine a statewide rollout strategy for the new system.

● For more information, contact the AOC's Finance Division, 415-865-7960.

Report Shows Increased Access for Families

A federal grant program to expand services for families with children in California's family courts has greatly increased parents' access to and visitation with their children, according to a new Judicial Council report to the Legislature.

Launched five years ago, the Access to Visitation Grant Program was designed to assist families with the process of separation and divorce so that parents and children do not lose contact with each other. The report is titled *California's Access to Visitation Grant Program for Enhancing Responsibility and Opportunity for Nonresidential Parents—The First Five Years: Report to the Legislature*. Among other findings, it shows that:

□ With the support of federal grant funding, free and low-cost sliding-scale services—such as supervised visitation and exchange services, parent education, and group counseling—are now available in approximately 30 of the state's 58 counties.

□ More than 15,000 parents who have separated since the inception of the grant program have had contact with their children because of the program.

□ Many of the supervised visitation and parent education programs that have been established through the Access to Visitation Grant Program have become "best practice" models that can be used as model pilot projects nationally as well as in California.

Each year beginning in 1997, and subject to the availability of funding, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has awarded a total of \$10 million in block grants to all states to promote access and visitation programs that increase noncustodial parents' involvement in their children's lives. Nationally the funds are used for mediation (both voluntary and mandatory), counseling, education, development of parenting plans, visitation enforcement (including monitoring, supervision, and neutral drop-off and

pick-up), and development of guidelines for visitation and alternative custody arrangements. California, however, is limited by statute to using the money for supervised visitation and exchange services, parent education, and group counseling for parents and children.

The report gives the Legislature details of the programs funded in federal fiscal years 1997–2001 and provides an overview of program administration and accomplishments, review and selection processes, reporting requirements, participant data, and the scope and availability of support services to families with children in family courts.

In addition to sending the report to the Legislature, the council also forwarded a copy to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. After reviewing the report, the agency commented that California's Access to Visitation Grant Program is "both instructive and exem-

plary" and that "other court systems might benefit from [its] lead."

The report does not contain any specific recommendations but does present possible actions for improving parents' access to and visitation with their children, including:

1. Establishment of mandatory training and education requirements for service providers;
2. Expansion of the program's services to the courts and communities that are currently not funded, especially in rural areas;
3. Recognition of these programs as necessary in the continuum of court-based services for parents and children; and
4. Identification of adequate resources for these services.

● For more information on the Access to Visitation Grant Program, contact Shelly Danridge, Access to Visitation Grant Coordinator, Administrative Office of the Courts' Center for Families, Children & the Courts, 415-865-7565; e-mail: shelly.danridge@jud.ca.gov. ■

Drug Court Claims

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But after completing drug court:

► Seventy percent of the participants were employed, as opposed to the 38 percent who had been employed at the time of entry into the program;

► Eleven percent of the participants, while in the program, had obtained general education diplomas or high school diplomas, 8 percent had earned vocational certificates, and 1 percent had completed college;

► Twelve percent of participants had transitioned from homelessness and acquired housing; and

► Twenty percent of participants had obtained driver licenses and car insurance.

"Often the defendants we see have not received a lot of positive feedback in their lives," says Judge Stevens. "Drug courts provide judges with the opportunity to provide encouragement instead of just punishment."

DEVELOPMENT OF DRUG COURTS

The first structured drug court was created in Dade County, Florida, in 1989. During the 1990s, drug courts emerged as an alternative to incarceration for substance-abusing offenders, thanks to a nationwide grassroots effort led by the courts.

In California, the first drug court was begun in 1993 in Oakland. Currently, California has more than 158 drug courts, and 50 of the 58 counties contain at least one.

In a drug court, a judge heads a team that focuses on sobriety and accountability. Drug courts employ features such as early identification and placement in treatment, access to a continuum of drug treatment and rehabilitative services, a nonadversarial approach, and regular and ongoing judicial monitoring.

COST SAVINGS

The study assessed the cost-effectiveness of drug courts in terms of incarceration costs and fees or fines paid by drug court participants. It concluded that during the life of the study, the \$14 million in DCPA program funds together with other funds that support California drug courts saved the state approximately \$43 million. Specifically, the assessment showed that:

► A total of 425,014 jail days were avoided, with an averted cost of approximately \$26 million;

► A total of 227,894 prison days were avoided, with an



A recent drug court graduate, with her drug-free baby, rejoices as she hears that the charges against her have been dismissed following her completion of the program. For many graduates, the completion of drug court and a substance abuse treatment program marks a new beginning not only in their own lives but in the lives of their families and communities. *Photo: Courtesy of the Superior Court of Orange County*

averted cost of approximately \$16 million; and

► Participants who completed drug court programs paid almost \$1 million in fees and fines imposed by the court.

But those involved in making drug courts work say that more important than the monetary savings are the positive effects drug courts have on the participants, their families, and their communities.

"We work together, confronting the clients again and again to stay in treatment and improve their lives," says Superior Court of Santa Clara County Judge Stephen V. Manley. Judge Manley not only co-chaired the steering committee that helped to implement the study and plan its evaluation but oversees his county's drug court, chairs the

Drug Court Systems Executive Steering Committee, and serves on the Collaborative Justice Courts Advisory Committee with Judge Stevens. Judge Manley adds that drug courts "offer clients a chance to change and to attain goals they never dreamed of."

The *DCPA Final Report* is the first in a series of drug court reports. The Judicial Council and ADP will continue to evaluate California drug courts based on these preliminary results.

● To view the full report, visit www.courtinfo.ca.gov/reference/documents/dc_partnership.pdf. For more information on drug courts or on the study, contact Nancy Taylor, Administrative Office of the Courts, 415-865-7614; e-mail: nancytaylor@jud.ca.gov. ■

Scenes From a Drug Court

In May, in recognition of National Drug Court Month, the California courts are celebrating the success of drug court graduates through an online photo exhibition on the judicial branch's public Web site. The online show was developed collaboratively by the courts, the AOC, other public agencies, community-based organizations, and individual counselors.

To view the exhibition, visit www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/drugcourts/.